

NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences

Evaluation of the Research Unit – Academy of Leisure and Tourism

Preface

This report entails the assessment of the organisation and the quality of the research conducted by the research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (hereafter NHL Stenden) in the years 2014-2018. The research unit and NHL Stenden, in consultation with Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA), set up an external independent evaluation committee to perform the evaluation. NQA has screened the independence and expertise of the committee members.

The evaluation committee consisted of:

Mr. F. Radstake (chair and expert in the field of leisure, tourism and events management)

Mr T.G. Bauer, PhD (committee member and researcher in the field of leisure, tourism and events management)

Ms N. Ferdinand, PhD (committee member and researcher in the field of leisure and events management)

Ms ir. M. Dekker-Joziase and ms W. Rowaan MA, auditors of NQA, acted as secretaries to the committee. Appendix 3 provides more details about the expertise of the individual committee members.

The evaluation of the research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism has been executed following the *Branch Protocol for Research Quality Assurance 2016-2022* of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen).

Organisation of the evaluation

The Academy of Leisure and Tourism has provided the committee with a documentation set, consisting of a self evaluation report, a representative selection of the (research) products and publications and other relevant documents (appendix 1). The committee studied these documents prior to the site visit. The selected (research) products represent the three different professorships and the overall output of the research unit. The provided documentation enabled the evaluation committee to gain an understanding of the research unit and to prepare the site visit.

Prior to the site visit, the committee members gathered via Skype to exchange views and to prepare the interviews with the different stakeholders of the research unit. The actual site visit took place on 14 November 2019. During this visit, the committee had meetings with several stakeholders of the research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism, and studied additional documentation to reach a more in-depth understanding of the research unit. The total of the provided information (both before and during the site visit), enabled the committee to reach a deliberated judgement.

The evaluation of the research unit and the evaluation of the Master degree programme International Leisure, Tourism and Events Management were combined in one site visit. Both evaluations were carried out by the same evaluation panel and the programme aligned the self-evaluation reports of the research unit and the Master programme. This reflects the high degree of integration between the activities of the three professorships and the educational programmes,

of the Academy Leisure and Tourism, and in particularly the Master study programme International Leisure, Tourism and Events Management.

Structure of this report

This report follows the five standards of the so-called *Branch Protocol for Research Quality Assurance 2016-2022* and describes the findings, deliberations, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation committee.

The characteristics of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism and NHL Stenden are outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 addresses the committee's findings and conclusions regarding the five standards of the branch protocol. The judgments of the committee are described in Chapter 3. The report concludes with several recommendations in Chapter 4. The committee declares that the evaluation of the research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism of NHL Stenden was carried out with impartiality.

Utrecht, date

Chair



F. Radstake

Secretary



M. Dekker-Joziase

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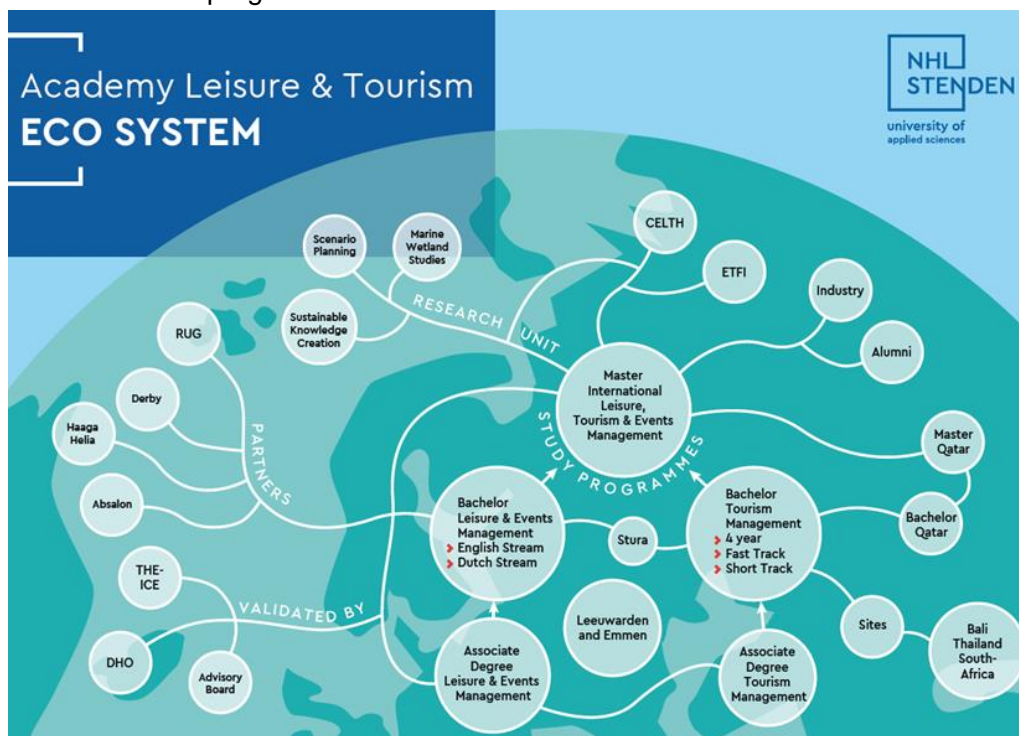
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1. Short outline of the research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism

With its research, NHL Stenden aims to make a substantial contribution to the knowledge circulation and knowledge development in the region. The research vision of NHL Stenden is: *exploring to create a better world: developing knowledge for real-life innovations and supporting our students to develop into skilled, innovative and service-oriented professionals*. In line with its Design Based Education concept, NHL Stenden has chosen to develop its own research concept in the coming years, called Design Based Research. To accomplish these objectives, the university has pointed out three focus areas for research: Vital Regions, Smart and Sustainable Industries, and Service Economy. Centres of Expertise have been set up to organise research in each focus area.

The research unit of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism is one of the research units of NHL Stenden and is connected to the Centre of Expertise in Service Economy and to the focus areas on NHL Stenden. The research unit consists of three professorships: Marine Wetland Studies (MWS), Scenario Planning (SP) and Sustainable Innovation in the Regional Knowledge Economy (SIRKE). These professorships acted independently until the formation of the Stenden School of Leisure and Tourism in 2011. In 2018, the Stenden School of Leisure and Tourism changed into the Academy of Leisure and Tourism, because of the merger between NHL University and Stenden University.

Besides research, the Academy of Leisure and Tourism organises several educational programmes: the Bachelor and Associate Degree programme Leisure and Events Management, the Bachelor and Associate Degree programmes in Tourism Management and the Master programme International Leisure, Tourism and Events Management (see figure below). The professors and researchers of the research unit form the links between the professorships and the educational programmes.



At national level, the research unit of Leisure and Tourism is partnering in the national Centre of Expertise for Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (CELTH). CELTH aims to identify trends and developments in the hospitality sector and to initiate cooperation between industry and education.

Professorship Scenario Planning

The professorship Scenario Planning (SP) started in 2010. The leading professor is Albert Postma (1 fte) and there are currently five professorship members (5 * 0.2 fte). SP is integrated with the knowledge centre of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism: the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI). ETFI carries out contract-based research in the field of future studies and scenario planning for leisure and tourism. ETFI provides the research infrastructure and contract activities, whereas the professorship Scenario Planning focuses on practice-oriented and academic research related to the future of tourism and scenario planning.

Professorship Marine Wetland Studies

Marine Wetland Studies (MWS) started in 2007 upon the initiative of the Wadden Sea Society. The aim of the professorship MWS is to develop knowledge for the protection, conservation and sustainable development of the international Wadden Sea region. Until 2016, MWS was a combined professorship with Hanze University. After that, the professorship was continued at Stenden University and integrated into the organisational structure of ETFI. The leading professor is Hans Revier (0.2 fte) and there are currently two professorship members (total 0.4 fte). The current term of the professorship will end in 2020. At the time of the site visit, it was not yet known if the term of the professorship would be renewed for another four years.

Professorship Sustainable Innovation in the Regional Knowledge Economy (SIRKE)

Sustainable Innovation in the Regional Knowledge Economy started in 2009 as a combined professorship of ROC Alfa College ('MBO': senior secondary vocational education) and Stenden University. The aim of the professorship is to develop knowledge innovation in the region of Drenthe, Groningen and Friesland by forming regional strategic alliances. The professorship cooperates with Hanze University in Groningen and with ROC Friesland College as well. The leading professor is Ineke Delies (1 fte) and there are currently 6 professorship members at NHL Stenden (1.2 fte). Researchers appointed at ROC Alfa College, Hanze University and ROC Friesland College complete the research group. The total research capacity is 7.4 fte. The research unit is organised in two regional teams: Groningen and Friesland/Drenthe. The current term of the professorship will end in 2020. At the time of the site visit, it was not yet known if the term of the professorship would be renewed for another four years.

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism of Stenden University was evaluated by an external audit panel in 2014, followed by an internal mid-term review in 2017. Upon recommendation of the external audit panel, the three professorships have focused the past few years on creating a shared mission, research profile and research programme, and on improving the academic climate within the Academy of Leisure and Tourism.

2. Standards

This chapter describes the findings, deliberations and conclusions of the committee with regard to the five standards of the 'Branch Protocol for Research Quality Assurance 2016-2022'.

Standard 1

The research unit has a relevant, ambitious and challenging research profile and a research programme with corresponding targets that are substantiated within several indicators.

Research profile and research programme

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the research unit Leisure and Tourism has invested in renewing its mission, research profile and research programme in the past few years. This has led to the following mission statement:

the mission of the research unit Leisure and Tourism is to develop, share and apply knowledge, and to initiate, develop and maintain partnerships, networks and learning contexts in order to contribute to a sustainable and resilient leisure and tourism sector, development of education, and to strengthen the connection between education and practice.

The professorships in Leisure and Tourism aim to support the tourism sector to respond to changes in society, and to prepare leisure and tourism students and teaching staff to work in this rapidly changing environment. During the site visit, the committee was pleased to learn that event management is part of the scope of research as well, although the name of the research unit does not reflect this (the current title of the unit is 'Academy of Leisure and Tourism Research Unit'). The three professorships use different approaches to realise the research unit's mission, but they share four joint drivers:

- regional embedding, with a focus on partnerships based on co-creation, reciprocity and trust;
- value-driven and sustainable research processes;
- creating challenging educational and learning environments, with a focus on real-world learning and learning-by-doing;
- a more innovative, resilient, multidisciplinary, and future-proof leisure and tourism industry.

According to the committee, the vision and mission of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism are in line with the research vision of NHL Stenden. Sustainability is a key concept in NHL Stenden's education and research, and this is reflected by the research profile of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism. The committee has learned that the research unit of Leisure and Tourism is involved in the development of NHL Stenden's Design Based Research concept, which is an important element of the university's research strategy. Further, the research unit of Leisure and Tourism has a strong connection to 'Service Economy', one of the NHL Stenden focus areas for research. Moreover, there are links with the other two focus areas, Vital Regions

and Smart and Sustainable Industries, as well. Finally, the committee has learned that the research unit of Leisure and Tourism has even taken the lead in developing the focus area of Service Academy and its Centre of Expertise at NHL Stenden.

Scenario Planning

The professorship Scenario Planning focuses on strategic foresight for the leisure, tourism and hospitality sectors in The Netherlands and Europe. The professorship uses future studies and scenario planning to create scenarios that enable organisations, companies, tourist destinations and regions to prepare better for the future. In the past years, *visitor pressure* and *overtourism* were core research themes of Scenario Planning.

Marine Wetland Studies

The professorship Marine Wetland Studies aims to contribute to the sustainable development of the Wadden Sea area by creating knowledge. Research of MWS concentrates on contributions to spatial transitions and improvement of the attractiveness of the northern coastal area for residents and visitors.

Sustainable Innovation in the Regional Knowledge Economy

The main focus of SIRKE is to develop innovative and strategic forms of collaboration between public and private parties in the regional knowledge economy. The professorship creates regional learning networks for researchers, lecturers of universities of applied sciences, lecturers of vocational education and professionals. These regional strategic alliances are used to develop knowledge innovation in the field of leisure, living and health in the regions Drenthe, Groningen and Friesland.

The committee is positive about the focus of the three individual professorships. The professorships study relevant topics and their research is ambitious and result-driven. This was confirmed during conversations with external stakeholders. They have described the research of Leisure and Tourism as valuable and highly relevant. The research projects match the needs of external stakeholders, such as local governments, tourism agencies and local entrepreneurs very well.

Inter-connections between the professorships

Since 2015, the focus has been on creating inter-connections between the three professorships by following a thematic approach. This has resulted in four shared research themes: *national parks*, *regional transition*, *health tourism* and *learning networks*. This has resulted in a few combined research efforts in the past few years that have generated output and results. An example is the joint research project 'Holwerd aan Zee'. The three professorships all use their expertise in this project that aims to restore the connection between the Wadden Sea and the hinterland by creating an opening in the dyke. The professorship Scenario Planning has contributed knowledge about regional transitions, the professorship SIRKE has contributed knowledge about creating learning networks and involving locals, and the professorship Marine Wetland Studies has contributed specific knowledge about the Wadden Sea. Expected results are innovations in coastal defence, new options for water management, agricultural transitions and new pull factors for tourism management. In addition, there have been several projects in which two professorships have combined forces, such as strengthening the regional identification of Geopark Hondsrug (SIRKE and SP) and the creation of learning networks in Zeeland (SIRKE and MWS). Very recently, the research unit identified 21 research themes that could lead to

combined research projects. Furthermore, the research theme *festivalisation* was defined as a uniting theme that could be used by the professorships to focus their joint research efforts. The committee is positive about these recent developments and encourages the research group to use these themes structurally to organise combined research lines.

The committee sees that the three professorships are moving towards more cooperation, although this still is in an early phase. Both internally and externally, Leisure and Tourism presents and organises itself mainly as a combination of three individual professorships and less as a coherent research unit. The committee found this impression confirmed by representatives of the professional field during the site visit. Therefore, the committee recommends the research unit to continue working on a shared research profile and research programme and to develop an overarching brand name that covers the profile of the research unit as a whole.

Targets and Key Performance Indicators

The research unit has translated the mission and general aims into more detailed objectives and uses the university's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor the progress of its research. The KPIs focus on the participation of lecturers in research activities, the participation of students in research activities, the number of research publications, valorisation of research results and the connection to NHL Stenden's focus areas. The Academy of Leisure and Tourism has set targets for these KPIs and reports every few months about its progress. The three professorships use the annual plans to describe their focus and aims and to report about the progress of their research. The committee believes that the objectives, targets and KPIs of the research unit are well-chosen, coherent and clearly formulated.

Conclusion

The evaluation committee concludes that the vision and mission of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism are clearly linked with NHL Stenden's policy, mission and vision. The research programme is relevant and ambitious and clearly related to the need of professionals in leisure and tourism in the northern provinces of The Netherlands. The research vision, mission and general objectives are established at the level of the research unit, but profiling still merely takes place at the level of the professorships. In the past few years, the research unit has been working on a more coherent research programme by stimulating inter-connections between the three professorships through a thematic approach. This has paid off in shared research projects and valuable inter-connections between professorships. The committee is positive about these developments, but encourages to create more cohesion between the three professorships. Therefore, the committee recommends the research unit Leisure and Tourism to continue working towards a more unified profile. In addition, the committee would suggest developing one overarching brand in external communications, instead of using the three individual names of the professorships. This brand should include the subject domains of tourism, leisure and events.

Following the above-mentioned considerations, the evaluation committee assesses the performance of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism on standard 1 as **satisfactory**.

Standard 2

The way in which the unit is organised, the deployment of people and resources and the internal and external collaborative links, networks and relationships enable the realisation of the research profile.

Organisation of the research unit

The Academy of Leisure and Tourism describes itself as a research-driven academy with an open system. The academy is organised as a network organisation, which includes many individual connections between researchers, lecturers, students and professionals. The academy is managed by the academy director.

The research unit consists of the three professorships and falls under the responsibility of the academy director. The professorships SP and WMS are integrated with ETFI, which implies that the ETFI programme manager is responsible for the project portfolios of these professorships (including all financial, administrative and HR aspects). In addition, the professors are responsible for the research quality of their professorships. The professors and the ETFI programme manager report to the academy director directly.

The professorship SIRKE is not integrated into ETFI, because of its partnership with ROC Alfa College. The professor of SIRKE is appointed as professor/lector by both NHL Stenden and ROC Alfa College. The professor is responsible for the organisation and administration of the project portfolio, as well as for the research quality. SIRKE is divided into three regional teams, representing the provinces of Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen.

The committee is positive about how the research unit has adapted its organisational structure to the different professorships. The research unit of Leisure and Tourism organises regular meetings with all professors, quality managers, research lecturers, the market communication officer and the academy director to discuss organisational matters. According to the committee, this is an important tool to assure the connection between the research unit and the educational programmes. In addition, there are regular contacts between the three professors to discuss research matters and they conduct peer review. According to the committee, the research unit could further optimise its organisation by creating comparable work flows for the three professorships. Best practices of the three professorships could be used for streamlining and standardising procedures and work processes.

Portfolio

The research agenda of the research unit is driven by input on relevant topics from the industry. Research topics are mainly brought in via the Centre of Expertise of Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality (CELTH). The professorship SP has worked on several recurring topics in the past few years, such as *visitor pressure*, *overtourism* and *experience design*. A recently emerging theme is *responsible tourism*. SP often works on ETFI-projects, such as: *The future of inbound tourism to the Netherlands*. SP also regularly cooperates with Breda University of Applied Sciences and Hogeschool Zeeland in the context of CELTH. An example is a CELTH-project on *overtourism*, which studies overtourism in cities of various sizes in Europe. Within the professorship, researchers are working on seven research lines:

- Strategic foresight, scenario planning and social sustainability of tourism
- Hospitality and social attitudes
- Heritage, memory, identity
- Men-machine interaction, virtual reality
- International relations, geopolitics and tourism flows
- Design thinking, participatory design
- Futurism

The SIRKE professorship has four research lines:

- public-private partnerships and co-creation, sustainable processes and partnerships, inter-connections and learning networks in the region
- inter-connections between leisure, health and living
- learning at the (innovative) workplace
- learning networks and convenor roles

All three regional teams of SIRKE work on the four research lines, and researchers all work on their own sub-theme within a research line. Examples of such subthemes are 'care and leisure communication' (inter-connections between leisure, health and living) and 'living labs and regional communities of professionals and volunteers' (learning at the innovative workplace).

The focus of Marine Wetland Studies has been the relationship between the World Heritage Status of the Wadden Sea and tourism development. MWS works on three research lines:

- Development of coastal tourism, Wadden gastronomy
- Perception of the values of the Wadden Sea, relation man-nature, storytelling
- Areas with a special status, customer journey

According to the committee, the research portfolio fits well with the research profile and research programme. The research unit quickly responds to changes in the field and incorporates relevant themes and questions emerging from the field into its research portfolio.

People and resources

Each professorship consists of a team of researchers with a dedicated research appointment. The researchers are lecturers of the undergraduate and Master programmes of NHL Stenden, mainly from the Academy of Leisure and Tourism. The professorship Scenario Planning consists of one professor (1.0 fte) and five researchers (5*0.2 fte). The professorship MWS consists of 1 professor (0.2 fte) and two researchers (2*0.2 fte). The professorship SIRKE consists of one professor (1.0 fte) and six researchers of NHL Stenden (6*0.2 fte). In addition, there are researchers with a dedicated research appointment at ROC Alfa College (1.2 fte in total), who contribute to the SIRKE professorship as well.

The professorship SP is financed directly by NHL Stenden, this mainly concerns the personnel costs. The ETFI-projects in which SP participates, are financed by ETFI (contract research). The professorship MWS is financed by project-based activities deployed by ETFI. Most other costs are covered by project-based funding via ETFI as well. The professorships SP and MWS mainly rely on money coming from the first and third money flow. In addition, MWS has received a RAAK-SIA subsidy for one project in the past years.

The financial organisation of SIRKE is based on the partnership between ROC Alfa College and the Academy of Leisure and Tourism. Both organisations pay an equal sum to cover the basic financing of the professorship. In addition, each organisation finances 0.2 fte per researcher. Research projects are financed by both ROC Alfa College and the Academy of Leisure and Tourism. Researchers who are active in this professorship originate from the Academy Leisure and Tourism, ROC Alfa College, Hanzehogeschool and ROC Friesland College.

The committee believes that the research unit has sufficient financial resources at its disposal to realise the research portfolio. This applies to all three professorships, in spite of the differences in the financial organisation.

Collaborative links, networks and relationships

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism closely cooperates with ETFI on joint research projects. The professorships SP and MWS have access to a large international network via ETFI, including important players in the tourism industry, such as the UN World Tourism Organisation and the European Travel Commission. At national level, there is successful cooperation with Breda University of Applied Sciences and Hogeschool Zeeland via CELTH. Joint research projects focus on Customer Engagement, Business Intelligence and Sustainability Strategies. CELTH provides a research network in The Netherlands and delivers research questions from the professional field to the professorships. There is also a strong academic network in place. An example of this is the appointment of visiting professor Ian Yeoman (Wellington University), who annually visits the SP professorship.

The professorship SIRKE has various structural and strategic partnerships which include educational partners in both vocational and higher education in Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen, and the professional field. The professorship also has a good academic network of peer researchers.

According to the committee, the research unit has relevant collaborative links. The research unit is an attractive partner for other researchers and for professional organisations, both at regional, national and international level.

Conclusion

The committee views the research unit Leisure and Tourism as a good example of an adequately functioning network organisation. According to the committee, the network organisation (the Academy's eco system) provides a good baseline to the researchers and lecturers/lecturer-researchers of the academy. Furthermore, the research unit has sufficient financial resources at its disposal to realise the research portfolio. The research unit has built a strong external network, with structural and strategic alliances in the region, in The Netherlands and abroad. Taking into account the rather small size of the professorships, the committee believes that the research unit is well-organised. The research unit could further optimise its organisation by streamlining and standardising procedures and work processes.

Following the above-mentioned considerations, the evaluation committee assesses the performance of the research unit Leisure and Tourism on standard 2 as **good**.

Standard 3

The research and the research unit fulfil the standards that apply within the discipline, with respect to conducting research.

Explicit standard for practice-based research

The common driver of all research activities of the research unit is the focus on sustainable development. Research is required to have a long-term focus, respect social, economic and environmental values, involve civil society in the planning and development of research and eventually benefit the quality of life of local communities. Furthermore, the research of Leisure and Tourism is based on ontological principles, which is reflected in the use of a social-constructivist epistemology, and related methodologies such as action research, social and adaptive learning, value creation, narratives, open innovation and sustainable innovation processes. Desk research, and more conventional research methods such as interviews and surveys, is used in addition to social-constructive research methods.

By using a social-constructivist methodology, the research unit aims to involve all stakeholders in the development of knowledge. According to the committee, the regional learning networks set up by SIRKE are a good example of how this methodology works in practice. The learning networks focus on value creation and do this by stimulating cooperation between professionals, students and researchers, resulting in the development of knowledge, insights and innovations that help to solve practical or social issues.

The professorship SP has created a research method for strategic foresight and scenario planning, by combining principles of the social-constructivist epistemology, resilience and design thinking. In previous years, the focus of this professorship has mainly been on environmental scanning, force field analysis and the development of scenarios. In the coming years the professorship aims to focus more on translating scenarios to policy, which fits well with the mission of the research unit, according to the committee.

The MWS professorship has a broad and integral approach. Problems in the coastal area cannot only be solved by looking from the perspective of leisure and tourism, but need a multidisciplinary and integral approach. Therefore, in many research projects MWS cooperates with other research partners, with a different focus, expertise and methods. The Wadden Sea area is used as a living lab to study interactions between man and nature, especially in the domain of tourism. An example is the RAAK-SIA project OILS that investigates the effect and possible solutions of oil spills from different perspectives. Within this project, MWS focuses on the effects of oil spills on tourism in the Wadden Sea area, working together with researchers of Van Hall Larenstein University.

The interviews and the documentation set have shown the committee that NHL Stenden and the research unit keep a good eye on relevant frameworks, such as the Dutch Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Dutch and European privacy legislation. These frameworks are embedded in the university's research policy and procedures. Moreover, there is a professorship Research at NHL Stenden, which supports the research of other professorships and research units within

the university, such as Leisure and Tourism, by offering methodological assistance and providing advice.

Quality of research

The documentation set has provided the committee with a good overview of the total research output in the period 2014-2018. The committee is positive about both the quantity and the quality of the output. Each professorship has showcased several recent research projects, both prior to the site visit and during the site visit itself. Examples of the showcases were: Overtourism/Visitor pressure (SP), Holwerd at Sea (MWS), Company of Benevolence (SIRKE) and Geopark Hondsrug (SIRKE/SP). The combination of the overview list, written documentation and the presentations enabled the committee to gain good insight in the research quality of Leisure and Tourism.

The committee is very positive about the showcased projects. The quality of research is good, and sometimes even excellent. The committee was especially impressed by the research quality of the projects Visitor Pressure/Overtourism and Holwerd at Sea. The research products reflect a sound methodological approach. The research products that the committee has studied, comply with the standards of NHL Stenden, the research unit Leisure and Tourism and the relevant national and international frameworks or standards for applied research. The committee is enthusiastic about the large variety and practical relevance of research products and how these products reflect the themes and approach of the different research lines. Furthermore, stakeholders are very positive about the quality of research and the practical relevance as well. During the interviews, the committee learned that stakeholders especially value the holistic approach of the research unit, and the use of living labs in the region.

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism uses peer review to monitor and improve research quality. Peer review takes place between researchers of a specific professorship and between the three professors as well. Moreover, two visiting professors are also peer reviewing the three professorships. The committee is very positive about the use of peer review and learned from researchers that the quality of their research has indeed improved because of peer review. However, the committee has also understood that peer review is still in an early phase and not standardised yet, which implies that the effectiveness and quality of peer review may differ between researchers. Therefore, the committee would advise the research unit to standardise its peer review processes, to increase the learning outcomes and effects.

Conclusion

The committee evaluates the research quality as good. The research has a sound methodology, has practical relevance and is ethically justified. NHL Stenden University and the research unit of Leisure and Tourism use proper tools and procedures to monitor research integrity and research quality. The committee is positive about the use of peer review, and believes that standardising the peer review procedures would help the research unit to optimise the research quality and processes.

Following the above-mentioned considerations, the evaluation committee assesses the performance of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism on standard 3 as **good**.

Standard 4

The research unit realises sufficient relevance with respect to:

- *The knowledge development within the research domain;*
- *Education and training;*
- *Professional practice and society.*

The research has a sufficient degree of impact on the aforementioned sectors.

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism aims to contribute to a sustainable and resilient leisure and tourism sector. The research unit strives to achieve this by developing knowledge, and to use this knowledge to contribute to society and professional practice. In addition to this, the research aims to improve the development of future professionals by means of education of students and professionalisation of staff.

Knowledge development within the research domain

Output and impact

The output of the research unit Leisure and Tourism consists of peer reviewed journal articles, contributions to academic books, presentations at academic conferences and professional publications. The professorship Scenario Planning in particular has realised an impressive number of academic publications and presentations in the past few years. As of 2015, ETFI publishes its own academic, peer-reviewed, journal: *Journal of Tourism Futures*. This has contributed to an increase in the number of academic publications of the professorship SP as well. The academic output of MWS is smaller, which is understandable considering the relatively small size of the professorship. Nevertheless, the research activities of MWS have also resulted in several publications in international peer-reviewed journals and presentations at international academic conferences. The focus of the SIRKE professorship is to contribute to the development of professional knowledge, which has resulted in an impressive number of publications in professional journals.

It is evident to the committee that Leisure and Tourism is contributing to the development of both academic and professional knowledge in the domain of leisure and tourism. A good example is the project on *overtourism* by Scenario Planning, which has resulted in several peer-reviewed academic publications, as well as presentations and workshops at the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and European Association for European Tour Operators (ETOA).

Education and training

Output and impact

The objective of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism is to engage at least 40 percent of teaching staff in research projects. The committee was impressed to find that the academy indeed achieved this rather ambitious aim in the past year. Lecturers have reported to the committee that they feel very much supported to engage in research projects and to join a research unit. Most lecturers who are active in research engage in one of the learning networks or labs. Furthermore, there are currently 4 PhD students. The committee has understood during the site visit that lecturers of other academies of NHL Stenden are involved in the research projects of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism as well, for example researchers of the Academy of Hospitality.

According to the committee, the Academy of Leisure and Tourism has created an excellent link between research and education. The professorships are actively and structurally involved in the undergraduate programmes of Tourism Management and Leisure and Events Management of NHL Stenden, by teaching modules and organising internships. For example, the professorship SP has initiated a learning line in scenario planning and foresight in both Bachelor degree programmes. Furthermore, the MWS professorship organises lectures in the Bachelor degree programmes to introduce students to the history and features of tourism development in the Wadden Sea area. Another example is how the professorship SIRKE involves students in its innovative and real-life learning contexts, where they can participate in research activities as interns. An example is the project on healthy ageing and leisure. Local governments, companies and students were engaged in a learning network to address the problem of how elderly people can stay active and healthy.

The research unit plays a vital role in the Master degree programme International Leisure, Tourism and Events Management (MILTEM) as well. Each professorship organises a module within this Master degree programme. The professorship MWS organises the module 'Theoretical Perspectives on Leisure, Tourism and Events', SIRKE organises 'Quality of Leisure, Tourism and Events' and SP the module 'Policy and Planning for Leisure, Tourism and Events'. Furthermore, the professors are involved in the research module and thesis process.

Professional practice and society

Output and impact

Most of the research projects that involve professional practice and society are contract-based research activities. Work field representatives have reported to the committee that they highly appreciate the holistic approach of the researchers of Leisure and Tourism. The research unit has created strong links with professional practice and society, both via ETFI and the creation of living labs and learning networks. According to the work field, the living labs and learning networks create surplus value and improve the impact of research. The committee has seen several projects that have created real impact for the communities. A good example of impact on professional practice and society by creating a learning network is the Geopark Hondsrug project, which has contributed to the protection of an area of great cultural-historical importance. The research unit has also proven to be able to transfer regional knowledge and experience to other regions. An example is 'Limburg 2030', a project in which SP organised workshops with the local government and inhabitants of Limburg to create scenarios for the future of the Limburg province.

The committee is very positive about the impact of the individual research projects. A next step would be to focus more on the dissemination of knowledge to the general public, for example by engaging more in societal discussions in the region. The topic *overtourism* for example is part of societal discussion in Friesland. The committee is of the opinion that the research unit could use its knowledge to play a role of importance in such discussions.

Conclusion

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism has many interconnections between research, education and practice. The publication record of Leisure and Tourism shows that the research unit is contributing to the development of both academic and professional knowledge in the domain of leisure and tourism. Furthermore, the Academy Leisure and Tourism has organised the dissemination of research in the educational programmes in an excellent way. Research is structurally embedded in the educational programmes and an impressive number of lecturers is

involved in research activities. This shows that the Academy of Leisure and Tourism truly is a research-driven academy. The committee believes that this also shows that the research unit acted well upon the recommendations of previous audit panels to improve the academic climate. The research unit has created strong links with professional practice and society, both via ETFI and living labs and learning networks. This provides excellent opportunities to create impact in the region. The committee is positive about the impact that Leisure and Tourism already has created via its research projects, and would advise the research unit to take this to an even higher level by focusing more on dissemination of knowledge to the general public and by participating in public debates in the region.

Following the abovementioned considerations, the evaluation committee assesses the performance of the research unit of Leisure and Tourism on standard 4 as **good**.

Standard 5

The research unit conducts regular and systematic evaluations of the research processes and results. The research unit then, where necessary, connects the results to improvements.

System of quality assurance

The research unit of Leisure and Tourism complies with the quality assurance system of NHL Stenden University, which is written down in the Framework Quality Assurance Research NHL Stenden (2018). In this system, quality assurance is merely organised at the level of the research unit. Important elements of the quality assurance system are the multiple year plans and the annual plans of the professorships and the research unit. Furthermore, the R-reports of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism are used to reflect on the progress and realisation of NHL Stenden's KPIs.

In addition to the framework, the university has drafted a quality assurance handbook, which is used as a quality manual for researchers. The handbook includes KPIs and formulates the conditions for proper implementation of research at NHL Stenden. The quality assurance system is rather new, as it was created after the merger between NHL University and Stenden University in 2018. Nevertheless, the documentation (such as the annual plans) already reflects the renewed quality standards well, according to the committee.

Every six years, internal midterm audits are organised by NHL Stenden to provide peer review of the research processes and results. Next to this, the research unit of Leisure and Tourism organises peer review sessions in which the professorships evaluate each other. The committee is positive about these internal peer review sessions, because they help to create a shared vision on quality and enable professors and researchers to learn from each other. The research unit has proven to learn from feedback. An example is the effort that the research unit made in the past years to improve the academic climate.

The documentation and interviews clearly reflect a research environment with ample opportunity for researchers to share experiences and to learn from each other. Furthermore, the committee understood during the interviews that ETFI keeps a very good and transparent documentation record, and regularly sends out evaluations to clients. The committee advises the research unit to use the ETFI system of documentation and evaluation as a benchmark for non-ETFI projects as well.

Conclusion

The research unit and NHL Stenden University have a thoroughly designed quality assurance system. This system provides the research unit with good tools to conduct regular evaluations of the research quality and research processes. Furthermore, the research unit has created a research environment with a positive atmosphere which enables continuous development and improvement. The committee is positive about the self-critical and constructive attitude of researchers and lecturers and their openness to feedback and improvement. The committee advises the research unit to learn from the good practices of ETFI with regard to documentation and evaluation.

Following the abovementioned considerations, the evaluation committee concludes that the research unit Leisure and Tourism **complies** with standard 5.

3. Conclusive judgements

Assessments of the standards

The evaluation committee comes to the following judgments with regard to the five standards.

Standard	Oordeel
<i>Standard 1 Research profile and research programme</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Standard 2 Preconditions</i>	Good
<i>Standard 3 (Methodical) research quality</i>	Good
<i>Standard 4 Results and impact</i>	Good
<i>Standard 5 Quality Assurance</i>	Complies

The judgements are based upon the assessment guidelines as described in the Branch Protocol for Research Quality Assurance 2016-2022 of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences ('Vereniging Hogescholen', October 2015). The judgement 'satisfactory' (or higher) for standard 3 is a prerequisite to come to a positive final overall judgement.

The evaluation committee has seen that the Academy of Leisure and Tourism truly is a research-driven academy. The committee is impressed by how the academy and its research unit have organised the dissemination of research into the educational programmes. In addition, the research unit has created very strong regional networks. This provides the research unit with an excellent position to connect research, education and the professional practice in the field of leisure, tourism and events in the northern region of The Netherlands. The evaluation committee would like to recommend the research unit of Leisure and Tourism to focus the coming years on creating a unified research profile, to make sure that its ambitions can be met. Furthermore, the research unit is advised to further optimise its organisation by streamlining and standardising procedures and work processes, based on best practices of the three professorships.

The evaluation committee assesses standard 1 as 'satisfactory' and standards 2, 3 and 4 as 'good'. Standard 5 complies with the basic conditions for quality assurance. Overall, the committee assesses the quality of the organisation and research of the research unit Leisure and Tourism of the Academy of Leisure and Tourism as **good**.

Recommendations

The committee comes to the following recommendations:

Standard 1

The committee recommends the research unit Leisure and Tourism to create a more unified profile and to develop one brand name.

Standard 2

Optimise the organisation by streamlining and standardising procedures and work processes.

Standard 3

Improve peer review by standardising the peer review process.

Standard 4

Focus more on dissemination of knowledge to the general public, for example by participating in public debates (in the region).

Standard 5

Use the ETFI system of documentation and evaluation as a benchmark for non-ETFI projects as well.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Documentation

The committee has examined the following documents:

- Self Reflection Report
- Curricula vitae
- Annual plans 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
- Kader Kwaliteitszorg Onderzoek, NHL Stenden. 2018.
- Quality Assurance NHL Stenden, October 2019
- Previous evaluation report (2014) and follow-up action plan (2015).
- Overview of the research output 2014-2018
- Details on the key projects of each professorship
- Financial overview of each professorship
- Strategic Research Policy 2019-2024, NHL Stenden.
- Development plan research unit L&T
- Annual plans of the professorships

Appendix 2 Site visit programme

Time	Activity
08.30 – 09.30	Document check by panel
09.30 – 10.15	Presentation research projects
10.30 – 11.15	Meeting with professors
11.30 – 12.15	Lunch panel
12.15 – 13.00	Meeting with lecturers and research group members
13.15 – 14.00	Meeting with external stakeholders
14.15 – 15.00	Meeting with Management Team
15.15 – 16.00	Internal deliberations and preparation feedback
16.00 – 16.15	Panel report of findings (for Management Team)
16.15 – 16.30	Panel report of findings (plenary)
16.45 – 17.15	Development conversation with Management Team

Appendix 3 Expertise of the committee members

Mr drs. F (Frank). Radstake, committee chair,
chair of Reiswerk, a branch pension fund
responsible for Consumer Affairs and Social Policy of ANVR.
frequent speaker for international ECTAA meetings.

Mr T.G. (Thomas) Bauer PhD,
Auditor International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE, since
2005),
Adjunct Professor, in Sustainable Tourism, Central Queensland University School of Business and
Law,
Expedition guide, lecturer and Zodiac driver in Antarctica and the high Arctic,

Ms N. (Nicole) Ferdinand PhD,
Senior Lecturer Events Management at Bournemouth University
External Examiner for University of Bedfordshire, BA Event Management, BA Hospitality and Tourism
Management and BA Events Marketing and Management.

Mrs ir. M. (Marga) Dekker-Joziase, secretary, NQA

Mrs W. (Wietske) Rowaan MA, Secretary, NQA